

POLISH EXILES.

LETTER

*Upon the subject of lands granted by the Government to the exiled Poles,
and the location of the same, &c.*

APRIL 15, 1836.

[Printed by order of the House of Representatives.]

ALTON, March 22, 1836.

DEAR SIR: I have been returned from surveying on Rock river about six weeks. You no doubt recollect that when I saw you in Springfield last October, that I was going out to survey a district of public land on Rock river, out of which it was expected the Polish agents would select the 36 sections granted to the 285 Polish exiles, by an act of Congress, passed in June, 1834. I have so far completed the work assigned me as to enable the agents to select the three townships out of which they must select the 36 sections. The Rock river country is equal to any part of Illinois, and is fast filling up with settlers; some of them have large improvements for the short time they have been there. The most valuable improvement was made by Mr. G. Kent, in the fall of 1834 and 1835. Mr. Kent's improvement consists of a saw-mill, on a small stream that empties into Rock river, at a place now called Rockford, and a field of 80 acres. One of the Polish agents was out on Rock river last November, and selected township 46 north, range one east, of the third principal meridian, which is next to the State line; also township 28 north, range 11 east, of the fourth principal meridian, and which lies adjoining and west of township 46 north, range one east of the third principal meridian.

The settlers felt great interest in the subject of the Polish claims, having settled upon the land without expecting to be disturbed by foreigners. The agent manifested great sensibility on the subject, and great reluctance to take the improvements from the settlers, and promised many of them that he would not take their improvements. The selection of township 28 and 46, by the Polish agent left township 44, north, range one east, out of the range of his selection, and left township 45 north, range one, east, and townships 45 and 46 north, range two east, as the only townships from which he (the Polish agent) could select the third township, under the act of Congress before referred to. In consequence of this decision (which was considered final, so far as township 44 was concerned) the inhabitants of township 44 extended their improvements, and new emigrants coming in took up most of the land in township 44, which had not before been taken up. At the time the Polish agent was on Rock river, there were from twenty-five to thirty claims in township 44. There was no person living in township 45, range one, east; two families in 45

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north, range two east; three or four families in township 46 north, range two east, and five families in township 46 north, range one east. These townships are all very good land, and the Polish agent might have selected first rate lands without taking any improvements, and thereby conciliated the feelings of the American population. The Polish agent returned to St. Louis, and was informed by the surveyor general that the field notes of the exterior boundaries of township 28 north, range 11 east of the fourth principal meridian, had not been returned; he, therefore, could not give me instructions to subdivide said township. The agent, then, by the advice of some of his countrymen, and probably of some other persons in St. Louis, who wish to speculate in the Polish lands, determined to disregard his promise to the settlers *not to take their improvements*, and to change, in part, his selection, by townships, and to select townships 44, 45, and 46, north, range one east of the third principal meridian, and to take all the *improvements* in said townships. You are, no doubt, aware of the peculiar state of the public mind, in regard to the Polish exiles at the time they obtained the grant of public land. They were considered as a suffering and persecuted people, on account of their attachment to the principles of civil liberty; they, therefore, excited the sympathy of the American people, under the influence of which principle, rather than sound judgment, they obtained the grant of land. But it never could have been anticipated that the Polish agents, under the authority of an act of Congress, would presume to take possession of the improvements of American settlers. I have talked very freely with the Polish agent, in St. Louis, who is stiled Baron Chlopicki, on the subject of his selection, and told him plainly the consequences of his taking the claims of the settlers; that it would prejudice the public mind against the Poles, and that it would be the most unwise and impolitic course that could possibly be adopted. The agent replied that he had the *right* to do so, by the act of Congress, and that he would sell their land. I am inclined to think that he has been urged to this measure by some persons who think they can speculate out of the Polish lands; but I do not believe that, as the law now stands, the Poles can sell or transfer any right they have, or can acquire, to their lands, until they get possession, and "cultivate and occupy, for the space of ten years without intermission, in the proportion of one settlement to every five hundred acres of land." As by the act the selection is to be made under the Secretary of the Treasury, it appears to me that if the proper representations are made to that officer, he would give instructions to the Polish agents not to take the claims of actual settlers. This would be decidedly to the advantage of the Poles themselves, for the consequences can readily be foreseen of their attempting to drive off American settlers. Townships 45 and 46, range one east, and 45 and 46, range two east of the third principal meridian, are all good land, and there are not at this time more than twelve families in the whole four townships; for since it became probable that the Polish agents would select three of those townships there have been no new settlements made in them, while every other part of the country has been filling up very fast, with an enterprising and intelligent population. I have no doubt you will find it to your interest to visit that country before next August. I shall be surveying on Rock river all next summer, and should you come up there I should be very glad to see you. I think you have an opportunity of rendering an important service to a respectable portion of your constituents, which will not be forgotten before *next August*.

Public expectation has been sadly disappointed in regard to the *Polish exiles*; they have proved to be (with few exceptions) a miserable, degraded set of vagabonds, unworthy the esteem and regard of all respectable people. They are now dispersed to all parts of the United States; and some of them, as I am informed, have gone to Texas. They are generally engaged in keeping groceries, and many of them are *dissipated, indolent, and vicious*, having no qualifications or inclinations to be respectable citizens. Old Chlopicki himself is keeping one of the *meanest* groceries in St. Louis. General Langham told me about two weeks ago that he had no doubt that the next grand jury in St. Louis county would *indict* Chlopicki for keeping a disorderly house. Public opinion is now much stronger against the Poles than it ever was in their favor; and the opinion universally prevails that the Poles could not at this time obtain a grant of Congress for one single foot of land; but, as it is, we must make the best of the act of Congress, and permit them to make their selection, and avail themselves of the benefit of the law; but it is not believed by any intelligent gentlemen with whom I have conversed (and I have conversed with a great many) that they ever will comply with the terms of the law so as to obtain a title from the United States to a single tract of land. Under this view of the subject it is to be hoped that if the Secretary of the Treasury does *now* possess the power to control their selection, that he will instruct the Polish agents to regard the claims of actual settlers, and thereby put at rest a question which has produced no small excitement, and render to the Poles themselves an important service. Under existing circumstances it would be best for the Poles to take township 46 north, range one east, and two of the following described townships, viz: 45 range one, 45 and 46, range two east. I shall subdivide these townships early in the season; and the delay of which some of the Poles have complained so much would not be much inconvenience to them. The Poles had better go back to Poland than to go on to Rock river, and attempt to take possession of the improvements of the actual settlers. I had hoped that the present Congress would pass a law granting pre-emption to actual settlers; but from the latest accounts we have from Washington there is not much probability of it. This reluctance on the part of the representatives of a free and independent people to grant to actual settlers a right of pre-emption, contrasted with the law granting the land to the Poles, furnishes a striking commentary on the frailty of human nature, which in the one case denies to the enterprising and industrious American citizens, who suffer the privations and undergo the hardships of a frontier settlement, what it would seem they almost have a right to demand, as a matter of *right*, and in the other case a liberality towards a set of vagabond foreigners which has never been exercised towards our own citizens. Although this letter is addressed to you, it is intended for the whole Illinois delegation. I am informed by Judge Smith and others, that you have been advised, on this subject, what course the Polish agent intends to pursue, and you can with confidence rely upon this communication as to matters of *fact*. I also enclose a sketch plat, showing or representing the situation of all the townships referred to in this letter. Have the goodness to inform me of the final determination of this question. Address me at Chicago, Illinois.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

D. A. SPAULDING.

Hon. WM. L. MAY,

Washington city.

